

FRED BOWEN
SPORTS STORY

PLAYOFF DREAMS

FRED BOWEN





Published by
PEACHTREE PUBLISHERS
1700 Chattahoochee Avenue
Atlanta, Georgia 30318-2112

www.peachtree-online.com

Text © 1997 by Fred Bowen

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Photos of Wrigley Field and Ernie Banks obtained from the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, NY

Cover design by Thomas Gonzalez and Maureen Withee
Book design by Melanie McMahon Ives and Loraine M. Joyner

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
First Revised Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bowen, Fred.

Playoff dreams / written by Fred Bowen. -- 1st rev. ed.
p. cm.

Summary: Brendan, the best player on a losing baseball team, learns a lesson from a Chicago Cubs all-star about the true value of the game. Includes facts about pitchers, especially Ernie Banks.

ISBN 978-1-56145-507-2 / 1-56145-507-5

[1. Baseball--Fiction. 2. Winning and losing--Fiction. 3. Chicago Cubs (Baseball team)--Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.B6724P1 2009

[Fic]--dc22

2009016867

ONE

C*rack!* As soon as Cubs center fielder Brendan Fanning heard the bat smack the ball, he was off, chasing a high fly ball soaring toward right center field. Brendan's mind was racing as fast as his feet. *Runner on second, nobody out*, he thought. *The runner will be trying to tag up.*

"I got it. I got it," Brendan called out, keeping his eye on the falling ball. Brendan, a lefty, got under the ball, reached up with his gloved right hand, and snagged it out of the air.

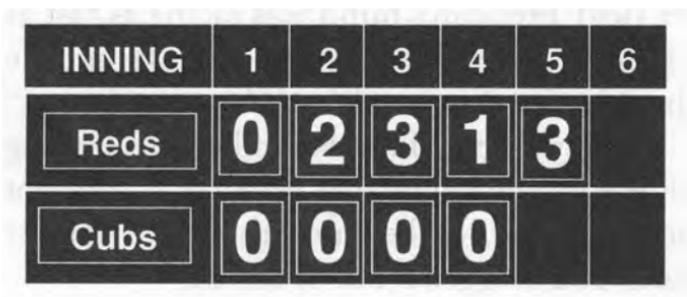
The runner at second tagged up and bolted for third base. But Brendan's throw to Josh Cohen, the Cubs third baseman, was right on target. The ball sailed low and

hard, skipping once on the infield dirt toward Josh's glove. The runner slid into third base in a cloud of dust and dirt. Leaning over the bag, the umpire spread his arms wide. "Safe!" he shouted.

"What?" Brendan yelled from the outfield. As the base runner brushed himself off at third base, Brendan saw Josh lean over to pick up the baseball lying in the infield dirt.

Brendan's shoulders slumped and he slammed an angry fist into his glove. *My throw was perfect*, Brendan thought as he trudged back to center field, *and Josh blew it*.

Four hits and three runs later, the Cubs jogged slowly off the field. Brendan glanced back at the scoreboard.



INNING	1	2	3	4	5	6
Reds	0	2	3	1	3	
Cubs	0	0	0	0		

“Boy, it’s gonna be a long season,” Brendan muttered to himself.

Mr. DeCastro, the Cubs coach, shouted encouragement to his team. “Come on, kids! Two more innings. We can get ‘em back. Top of the order. Michael, Tasha, Brendan. Look those pitches over. We need base runners. Let’s get a rally going!”

The inning started badly. Michael Mitchell grounded out to shortstop and Tasha Jackson hit a pop fly that fell right into the center fielder’s glove. Brendan stepped to the plate with two outs in the bottom of the fifth inning in a 9–0 game.

Brendan dug his left foot into the back of the left-handed batter’s box. He tapped the outside and inside edges of the plate with the end of the bat. Holding the bat loosely in his strong hands, Brendan cocked the bat above his shoulder and stared out at the Reds pitcher. He was ready to hit.

The Reds pitcher fired a fastball toward the inside half of the plate. Brendan uncoiled his strong, smooth swing and lashed the first pitch down the right-field

line. He sprinted to first base, thinking about extra bases with every stride. Rounding first base and halfway to second, Brendan looked over his shoulder to see the Reds outfielder still fumbling with the ball. Brendan set his sights on third base and turned on his speed. Fifteen feet from the bag, Brendan hurled himself headlong into third base. Brendan stretched out his hands and grabbed the bag a second before the third baseman slammed his glove into Brendan's back.

Safe! A triple.

Brendan called time out and brushed the dirt from the front of his Cubs uniform.

"Nice hit," congratulated Kyle McCleery, the Cubs third-base coach. "I didn't think you were going to make it."

"No sweat," Brendan replied. "Now let's see if someone can get me home."

But Brendan never got any farther than third base. Cubs pitcher Marcus Cooper sent a high pop fly to the Reds shortstop. Brendan jogged in and touched home plate as the ball settled into the shortstop's glove

to end the inning. The score was still 9–0.

Brendan grabbed his glove off the bench and started to run out to center field when Mr. DeCastro stopped him.

“I’m going to give Amy a chance to play center field for an inning, Brendan,” the Cubs coach said. “You take the rest of the game off.” As Brendan turned toward the bench with his head hanging low, Mr. DeCastro patted him on the back and said, “Nice hit. We’re going to need a lot of hits like those from our star player this year.”

Brendan took a seat at the end of the bench, stretched out his legs, and watched the rest of the game. He knew it was hopeless. The Reds added two more runs in the top of the sixth while the Cubs went down in order to end the game.

Mr. DeCastro tried to take the sting out of the 11–0 loss. “Tough game, kids. We’ll get ’em next time. There are still a lot of games left this season.”

Brendan and Josh gathered their equipment from the Cubs bench.

“You heading home?” Josh asked. He and

Brendan lived on the same street.

“Yeah,” Brendan nodded. The two friends trudged up a long hill leading away from the baseball field.

“Sorry about that throw in the fifth inning,” Josh said, breaking the silence. “It was right in my glove. No way I should have missed it.”

“That’s okay,” Brendan lied and kept walking.

“Man, 11–0!” Brendan finally blurted out as the boys neared their street. “Looks like we’re never gonna make the playoffs.”

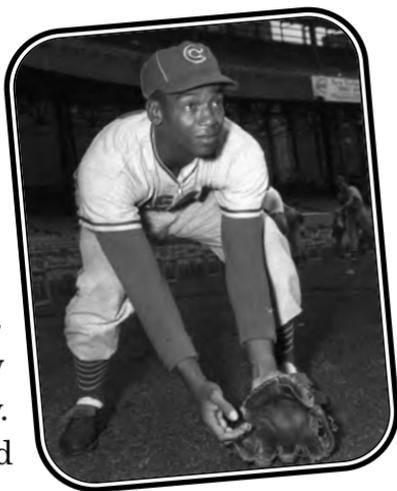
“We can still do it,” Josh said bravely. “Remember what Mr. DeCastro said, ‘There are still a lot of games left this season.’”

Brendan laughed. “That’s what worries me,” he said, turning for home.

ERNIE BANKS THE REAL STORY

During his nineteen-year Hall-of-Fame career with the Chicago Cubs, Ernie Banks set at least one record that he wished he had never set. Ernie Banks played in more games than any other major leaguer without ever playing in a playoff game or World Series!

Banks was not the only player whose playoff dreams never came true. Other players who played in a lot of games never saw any post-season glory. And they were good



players too. (You have to be good to play in more than 2,000 big-league games.) Here's a list of some of the most frustrated players in baseball history.

Terrific Players Who Never Made the Playoffs or the World Series and the Number of Games they Played

Ernie Banks, 1953-71	2,528
Luke Appling, 1930-50	2,422
Mickey Vernon, 1939-60	2,409
Buddy Bell, 1972-89	2,405
Ron Santo, 1960-74	2,243
Joe Torre, 1960-77	2,209
Toby Harrah, 1969-86	2,155
Harry Heilmann, 1914-32	2,146
Eddie Yost, 1944-62	2,109
Roy McMillan, 1951-66	2,093

Some pretty good pitchers also never had the chance to pitch in the post-season. Here is a list of some of the “winningest” pitchers (and their career wins) who never pitched in the playoffs or World Series:

Terrific Pitchers Who Never Made the Playoffs or the World Series and Their Career Wins

Ferguson Jenkins, 1965–83	284
Ted Lyons, 1923–46	260
Jim Bunning, 1955–71	224
Mel Harder, 1928–47	223
George “Hooks” Dauss, 1912–26	222
Wilbur Cooper, 1912–26	216
Larry Jackson, 1955–68	194
Emil “Dutch” Leonard, 1933–53	190
Mark Langston, 1984–1996	172
“Spittin’ Bill” Doak, 1912–29	170

Even among these outstanding players, Ernie Banks stands out. Born in 1931 into a family of twelve children, Banks went on to star in football, basketball, track, and baseball at Booker T. Washington High School in Dallas, Texas. After high school, Banks played professional baseball for the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro American League, a league made up of black baseball

players. In those days America was segregated; black players were not allowed in the major leagues until 1947, and very few blacks played in the majors until the 1950s.

At the end of the 1953 season, Banks and second baseman Gene Baker became the first blacks to play for the Chicago Cubs. Banks, who later was known as “Mr. Cub,” was one of baseball’s biggest stars. Between 1955 and 1960, he slammed more home runs (248) than any other player. That was more home runs than such big-time sluggers as Henry Aaron, Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays, or Ted Williams. Banks was also named the Most Valuable Player in the National League in 1958 and 1959.

Banks hit a total of 512 home runs. More than half of his homers came in the “friendly confines of Wrigley Field” where the Cubs fans were sure to hold on to any ball belted by Banks. It is true that, at Wrigley Field, Cubs fans throw back home-run balls hit by players on the other team, but they hang on tight to balls blasted into the stands by Cubs players!

Despite Bank's heroics, the Cubs could not get into the playoffs or World Series. But all the Cubs' defeats could not defeat Ernie Banks. Banks was known for his cheery disposition as well as his sure fielding and flashing bat. Banks kept smiling when other players might have given up or asked to be traded. "I never liked losing, but I could take it," he once said. "I loved the game. People want to change it...but I wouldn't change a thing. It's a great game."

Maybe his love for the game of baseball explains why during the ups and downs of his career, Ernie Banks could always say, "It's a beautiful day for baseball—let's play two."